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Florence Shotridge: A Woman, Tlingit, and Museum Educator Guide

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Abstract

This project aims to tell the life history of a Tlingit woman named Florence Shotridge (1882-1917) through both a written essay and a short film. Florence's husband, Louis Shotridge, is a well-known Tlingit ethnographer and collector, but much of his work in his early career was done in collaboration with Florence - yet she is not often mentioned in these early years of his work. Her life story requires a deep understanding of the social organization, geography, names and naming, and regalia in Tlingit culture and society. These cultural values played a large role in the work she produced as a Chilkat weaver, volunteer Educator Guide at the Penn Museum, and anthropologist on the Shotridge Expedition. Her work has been neglected in comparison to her husband's contributions, but much of his start in the field is thanks to Florence's English speaking and Chilkat weaving skills. In addition to this paper that lays out the social contexts of her time, I have created an accompanying short film which aims to breathe new life into Florence's story and to be shared widely in order to ensure her life and legacy extend beyond the periphery of the Penn Museum and the Tlingit community.

Link to the short film, *Florence Shotridge* (2021): <https://youtu.be/dQTTGmLd63k>

Keywords

Tlingit, Chilkat, Southeast Alaska, Shotridge Expedition, Penn Museum

Disciplines

Anthropology

**FLORENCE SHOTRIDGE: A WOMAN, TLINGIT, AND MUSEUM EDUCATOR
GUIDE**

By

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In

Anthropology

Submitted to the

Department of Anthropology

University of Pennsylvania

Thesis Advisor:

Dr. Lucy Fowler Williams, Associate Curator, Penn Museum

2021

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

Background

Florence Shotridge (1882-1917), or *Kaatxwaaxsnéi*, was a Tlingit woman from Haines, Alaska who - along with her husband, Louis Shotridge - worked at the Penn Museum in Philadelphia, PA, then known as Penn's Free Museum of Science and Art (Williams 2015, p. 66). Before diving into the history and details of Florence's life, and the methodologies I used to conduct such research, it is important to understand my own background. This will help readers understand my own potential biases as I strive to understand the cultural contexts of Florence Shotridge as a Tlingit woman in her time.

I am a 21-year-old, second-generation Pakistani-American woman. I have lived in Kentucky my whole life until I moved to Philadelphia for college. *I have no ancestral or cultural ties to the Tlingit Nation.* I am a U.S. citizen and it is important to recognize the privilege that comes with this status, especially when discussing Native Alaskan history in the U.S.. During Florence's lifetime, American Indians were not yet considered American citizens. American Indians and Native Alaskans were not considered equals, but rather were defined as non-human because they were not Christian. The 1887 General Allotment Act intended to break up Indian tribes and have Indians assimilate into American culture and society (Echohawk 2013). I explain further how this assimilation affected the Tlingit Nation in later sections, but such U.S. laws led to severe discrimination against Natives, and this cannot be forgotten when recounting the life of Florence in the broader context of Tlingit history.

I also have no previous experience conducting research in Alaska. I first learned about Florence Shotridge in an undergraduate course titled "Women Making History: The Penn Museum and the Centennial 2020" taught by Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

Professor at Penn, Dr. Heather Sharkey. Upon a surface-level exploration of Florence's biography, I felt a deep, intrinsic longing to learn more about her. This project aims to not only uncover more about Florence's life, but to do so in a way that is publicly accessible so that more people will know about Florence's impact on the Penn Museum and Tlingit history at large. This paper will be paired with a short documentary video on Youtube which will share a biographical sketch of Florence's life in hopes that her story will be shared more widely through this engaging and accessible medium.

Methodology

In order to find as much extant information as possible on Florence, I explored the archival material about her and her husband, Louis Shotridge, in the Penn Museum and the Canadian Museum of History archives and collections. In the Penn Museum archives, there is only one folder on Florence Shotridge. Within the folder are six newspaper clippings where Florence was interviewed, six photographs of her, and copies of the two articles she published in *The Penn Museum Journal*. In addition, my advisor, Dr. Lucy Fowler Williams, spearheaded the creation of The Louis Shotridge Digital Archive (2011) which is accessible online. This resource has been indispensable during my remote portion of research during the COVID-19 pandemic, and includes information on the Shotridges' life, as well as the objects, photographs, and audio recordings they collected during their expedition to Alaska. The Canadian Museum of History houses Florence's Chilkat Blanket that she spent about 22 months making (CMH #VII-A-131). While in correspondence with the archives team at the Canadian Museum of History, I gained access to the letters between Louis Shotridge and Edward Sapir negotiating the sale of Florence's Chilkat robe to the Museum in Quebec.

Once I was able to have access to the Penn Museum collections, I analyzed objects from the first Shotridge Expedition, an expedition led by both Florence and Louis. The objects I used for this study include woven and beaded objects since many Tlingit women like Florence used spruce root to create woven materials like baskets, hats, and clothing. Beading is also an important technique used by Tlingit women and beads were an important resource the Tlingit traded with other Native American tribes like the Athabascans (Beaver 2021). The most informative object I used at the Penn Museum is Florence's unfinished Chilkat blanket (PM NA3902). My advisor, Dr. Williams, is currently conducting her own research on Louis Shotridge's life work for the Penn Museum, and my research investigation into Florence's life is contributing to her work as well. As a result of my involvement, Williams updated the Museum database to more accurately identify Florence as the maker of the unfinished blanket.

I researched more broadly about Tlingit culture and society through ethnographies and texts. I also virtually interviewed two contemporary Tlingit community members in order to gain an emic perspective on their culture and traditions. In particular, I interviewed Lily Hope, a Tlingit Chilkat weaver from Juneau, Alaska who is affiliated with the *T'akdeintaan* clan of the Raven moiety. Lily learned Chilkat weaving from her late mother Clarissa Rizal and Kay Parker, and her contemporary work in textile and paper collage weave together Ravenstail and Chilkat design. I also interviewed Donna Beaver who is originally from Juneau, Alaska and currently resides in New Jersey. She is an artist and poet who currently works for the U.S. Geological Survey. Donna is affiliated with the *Kagwaantaan* clan and her family is from Juneau, Alaska. Her grandmother was Annie Dalton James, the sister of George Dalton, a famous caretaker of stories. Her mother, Anna Beaver, was a great traditional beader and also made dolls, moccasins, and embroidered pieces. Lily and Donna have shared invaluable details

and connections that bring Florence's life and community to life and give me a better understanding of Tlingit culture not only in the early 1900s, but today as well.

These two informants were given a release form that outlines the goals of this project and how its results will be disseminated. In order to establish a strong trust with the Native communities, which academics have often exploited in the past, it is important for me to ensure the Tlingit voices in this project are centered, rendered accurately, and respectfully. All informants were able to read, view, and edit both the paper and video portions of this project and were asked to alert me of any aspects they found inaccurate or inappropriate.

Video Component

In order to create the short documentary video, I filmed the aforementioned objects from the Shotridge Expedition in the Penn Museum. I have also included images from the Penn Museum's Shotridge Expedition and archives, as well as from the Canadian Museum of History's archives. I chose to create a video as part of this project because "anthropologists rarely, if ever, employ [visual media]... [which] can arguably provide a richer perspective" (Diaz-Barriga & Dorsey 2010, p. 132). In the past, ethnographic film has often done a disservice to Native Indians. The first, and arguably still most famous, ethnographic and documentary film *Nanook of the North* (1922), directed by Robert Flaherty, follows the life of an Inuit man, Nanook, who is called an Eskimo throughout the film. Nanook's real name is Allakariallak, but Flaherty gave each "actor" in the film Inuit nicknames. Flaherty attempted to preserve a dated and stereotypical image of the Native. In reality, by this time, Eskimos already wore American clothes, had access to guns, and other modern hunting technologies. *Nanook of the North* instead presents Natives in a way that preserves the "myth of the authentic first man" (Rony 1996, p. 99). Since 1922, ethnographic film and its representation of Native Indians has changed

significantly. Now, there are several indigenous film festivals, awards, and directing programs. Native filmmakers have even made films in conversation with and in critique of *Nanook of the North* (Rony 1996). I do not have the space in this paper to speak extensively about these shifts and the rise of Native filmmaking, but these changes are important and significant nevertheless.

In my own short film, I use scans of photographs, letters, and newspapers from the Penn Museum and Canadian Museum of History archives and a small number of contemporary images taken in Alaska by my advisor. In addition, I incorporate footage I have taken myself of objects and recorded interviews with Lily Hope and Donna Beaver. I combine all of these materials with a voiceover voiced by myself detailing Florence's life to bring cohesion to her life while allowing for easier access to the information I gathered through this senior thesis project. Florence's story currently only lives in texts and objects around North America, and my goal is for this film to breathe a new life into her history.

PART II: THE TLINGIT

Geography, Place, and Home

Tlingit people have a deep sense and knowledge of place and geography, and this relationship to space directly influences Tlingit social structure, house construction, and place names. I begin by describing where the Tlingit region is located and then explain how geography influences social structures and relationships via trade with other Indian tribes. Then I explain how this has shifted since Russian and American industry entered Alaska. After, I discuss how geography has influenced social identification in the Tlingit Nation by focusing on how the Raven moiety received its name and how place names in Alaska have been changing since American contact. Last, I examine the work Florence and Louis Shotridge conducted on Tlingits' connection to place and geography by detailing the Klukwan model the couple made of Louis'

hometown and the research they conducted when writing their article “Indians of the Northwest” where they detail how various types of housing are constructed.

The Tlingit Region is on the Pacific Northwest Coast, more specifically, it is located in Southeastern Alaska. “Much of the Tlingit region is a temperate rainforest composed of deep evergreen forests, fjords and islands. Few roads connect Tlingit communities, [and] Many areas in the region are designated National Park lands” (Louis Shotridge Digital Archive, 2011). According to Anthropologist Thomas F. Thornton (2015), social structure among the Tlingit is demarcated by Southeast Alaskan geography (p. 36). Some social structures and divisions are drawn along the lines of the southern, northern, and Gulf Coast regions of the Tlingit Nation. Other distinctions lie between the island and mainland environments (Ibid, p. 41). Each of these “microenvironments” (Ibid, p. 40) supplies different resources and therefore leads to differing systems of connection and culture in each place. These differences also lead to various trade networks not only across the Tlingit Region, but with other Native Indian tribes as well. Donna noted that Tlingits often traded with the Athabaskans, and in exchange for goods, Tlingits supplied them with floral beadworks, cedar baskets, smoked fish, and copper ore (Beaver 2021).

Once the Russians introduced the fur trade, and the Americans introduced commercialized fishing practices, gardening practices, and exploited Alaska for its land resources, Tlingits’ relationship to their geography changed (Thornton 2015). Americans not only brought their capitalist economics, but their culture of patrilineality, the opposite mode of intergenerational transfer of identity and *at.óow* of the Tlingits as well. This shift led to many tensions within the community (Ibid, p. 158). These economic shifts led to more commercial subsistence practices. In order to survive in a changing economy which was less reliant on trade, Tlingits had to change the way they engage with their geography.

Geography is an important factor when discussing social identification among the Tlingit.

Lukaax̱ádi clan leader, Austin Hammond (1910-1993), told Thornton about the origins of the Raven moiety which was named after a trickster in Tlingit legends:

I tell you for years and years we found in the river our livelihood and our food, the strength of our families... And each place has its own name. It was Raven who showed us how to get our food. Raven knew what was good for us, and taught the Tlingit how to live. Raven exists in our legends and our lives. Sometimes Raven is powerful and wise, and at other times Raven seems foolish. But always the stories of Raven hold special meaning for us. It was Raven who hung by his beak suspended from the clouds at the time of the Great Flood. It was Raven who taught our people to catch salmon. These are the stories my grandfathers passed on to me. These are the things I'm trying to teach my grandchildren. It is these stories which help guide our people as we live with the land... For Raven taught us, if we live with the land, not against it, the land will take care of us. The land, the river, they hear us! (Hammond qtd. in Thornton 2015, p. 48)

The Tlingit named a moiety after Raven because of his aid in harnessing the natural resources around them. The Tlingit's reliance on natural resources permeates into their spiritual life and socio-political identification.

Connection to place is important when naming meaningful spaces in the Tlingit region. Thornton asserts that now, Tlingits have to "bind and rebind" (Ibid, p. 7) themselves to their landscape due to anglicized renaming of key places Tlingit people are already familiar with. This will be further discussed in a later of this paper. In an interview, Donna Beaver (2021) said Tlingit names do not just have a biological connection to place, but a geological one as well. A connection to the rocks, ocean, landscape, etc. Thornton (2015) similarly discusses mapping, both of the geography, and of the body, as "constitutive elements of personhood" (p. 59).

One time, when picking berries with her grandmother in Alaska, Donna came across a bear. Her grandmother asked the bear politely to let them pick berries for the time being, and the bear left (Beaver 2021). This same incident happened to Huna clan mother Amy Marvin when

she asked the nearby bears for permission to pick berries and they did not bother her as she continued (Thornton 2015, p. 138). Thornton broadly defines place as “a framed space that is meaningful to a person or group over time” (Ibid, p. 10). More importantly, however, he discusses the “genre of place” which means that Tlingits assign a name, story, song, and design (Ibid, p. 30) to meaningful places. “Place is so central to oral tradition,” says Thornton (Ibid, p. 31), which only amplifies the importance of speaking with Tlingit individuals like Donna who along with her family have ingrained ecological knowledge that even the bears of Alaska understand to some degree and respect.



Figure 1: The model of Klukwan village that Louis and Florence both made as a first task at the Penn Museum. Photograph by Maria Murad (PM 29-228-2).

Tlingit connection to place is strong, and this is underlined by the work Florence and Louis did while at the Penn Museum. Louis, with the help of Florence, created a model of the center of his home village, Klukwan, which is pictured above in Figure 1, as his first task when

employed at the Penn Museum (CMH VII-A-131; PM 29-228-2). He had never built a model before, but this architectural piece is remarkably detailed and accurate (PM 29-228-2). Even within the dwellings, the furniture, painted crests, and figurines are to scale. This model is a prime example of the Shotridges' deep knowledge of place and their statement in "Indians of the Northwest" (1919) where they say, "A man was proud to be known as a member of his hometown where he was born and raised" (p. 81). The Shotridges state early on in the piece that the aim of the article is to give the reader an idea of what the Shotridges lives were like growing up in Haines and Klukwan. They use the majority of the latter part of the article to discuss the structural details of Chilkat houses from their villages. These descriptions include several detailed architectural renderings, showing the significance of house construction for Tlingit Indians.

They discuss dwelling, family, and provision houses. Dwelling houses were built larger than other houses as they were meant for the masses. They would accommodate large events, were made with spruce trees, and did not require nails. Measurements were made based on the thickness of fingers (Ibid, p. 86). Family houses were owned by families of the nobility, including Florence's family. People from both moieties came together to help build a family house where the head man or "Master of the House" (Ibid, p. 82) reside with his family and sometimes distant relatives. The design usually features one big open room to display *shagóon*, or old objects that belonged to a family's ancestors (Thornton 2015, p. 55). Lastly, provision houses were used for food preparation and storage. These were located near water and designed with extra fireplaces for cooking. All three types of houses were built with wood, including spruce, hemlock, and red cedar (Shotridge & Shotridge 1913, pp. 86-87). There is a deep knowledge of the natural resources surrounding Chilkat which then inform what is constructed

and how it is constructed. Depending on their construction style, each house played an essential part in community engagement whether it was a public ceremony, family gathering, or preparation of food. Knowledge of the natural resources surrounding Chilkat directly relates to how community engagement and ritual practices took place.

Social Organization

In order to better understand Florence's life, it is important to know about Tlingit social organization as it is essential to the interpersonal relationships among the Tlingit. This section aims to list and define the various socio-political units in the Tlingit Nation as they were at the time Florence was alive. These structures were more potent prior to European contact in 1784 (Shotridge Digital Archive 2011), so much had already changed at the time Florence lived, and especially today (Beaver 2021). Thornton (2015) establishes five levels or socio-political units within the Tlingit Nation: 1) Nation, 2) Moiety, 3) *Kwáan*, 4) Clan, 5) House, and 6) Person. After defining each of these six units, I use the ceremonious ritual of the potlatch, or *ku.éex'*, to show how these social divisions and rankings played a significant role in Tlingit ritual life.

There is one Tlingit Nation and it is a “weak political status based primarily on common language and culture” (Ibid, p. 43). Within the nation, there are two moieties (or halves) which are “important for organizing reciprocal exchange in ritual politics” (Ibid, p. 43). Florence and Louis state that these two sides are Raven and Eagle, and marriages united individuals from each side. This would create marital, and therefore familial, alliances that would help in later times of conflict, or even prevent any conflicts from arising in the first place (Shotridge & Shotridge 1913, p. 83).

Next, a *Kwáan* is “a weak political status based on common habitation, usually of a single winter village” and there were about 13-18 of them. *Kwáans* are subdivided into Tlingit

clans which are “a central socio-political unit based on matrilineage” of which there were 70+ (Thornton 2015, p. 43). The Shotridges define a clan as a collection of families under the same totem crest (Shotridge & Shotridge 1913, p. 83). Each clan is named after an important historical event that occurred to one of its members during the usual migration to the South from Chilkat (Ibid, p. 85). A few clans on the Eagle side include *Kawaganihitan*, or people of the house that burned; *Dakdawosidakina*, or people that strayed into the inside passage; and *Dakclawoyada*, or people of the inside sand beach (Ibid, p. 80). Louis recounts in several documents how his clan, the grizzly bear clan, received its name (Shotridge & Shotridge 1913; Shotridge Obj. VII-A-131).

Generations ago, there was a chief with one daughter, who refused all her suitors, and several sons, who were all talented hunters. One day, while going berry-picking with her friends, the princess slipped in bear manure and promptly insulted bears, “which was considered wrong, for it was believed that the spirit of an animal could hear and would often treat the offender according to the offense” (Shotridge & Shotridge 1913, p. 95; Shotridge Obj. VII-A-131). Later, on the walk back, she was alone and met a “handsome young man standing close by” (Shotridge & Shotridge 1913, p. 95). He took her to his house in his father’s village and told his father, a chief, that she was to be his wife. A celebration took place. However, one night, after living in his village for some time, and a fishing excursion where she felt she could not contribute properly, the husband turned into a grizzly bear. She then realized that she was living with the bear people, and her husband, a bear, took her because she disrespected bears when she slipped in their tracks. Despite her severe homesickness, she had no choice but to stay as she now had two sons with her spouse.

Meanwhile, the princess's family mourned her death in traditional Tlingit fashion. Then one day, when her brothers were on a hunting trip, the princess noticed their hunting dog. Her husband, the grizzly bear, gave up his life and was shot by the brothers as he knew it was wrong of him to keep the princess from her family. She went home with her brothers, leaving behind her two sons because they were still half cubs. "Through this woman the *Kagwantans* claim the grizzly bear as their crest, emblem of strength and high rank" (Ibid, p. 99).

Many clan origins stem from stories of transformation into other animals which allow the human to understand life from the point of view of animals (Thornton 2015, p. 79; Beaver 2021). These clans are then subdivided into families or house groups (Shotridge & Shotridge 1913, p. 84). A house (*hít*) was "based originally on the segment of a matrilineage in one house" of which were 200+ (Thornton 2015, p. 55). One person can occupy more than one family/house group (Shotridge & Shotridge 1913, p. 84).

Last in the socio-political units is a person, "a sociopolitical status acquired by birth, but big names/titles also reserved for high born Tlingit who distinguish themselves" (Ibid, p. 43). The Tlingit had nobles/elites or "chiefs," commoners, slaves, and powerful roles for women (Ibid, p. 42). Slaves no longer exist in Tlingit society (Williams 2021; Beaver 2021). Pre-missionary contact, there were about 10,000+ people in the Tlingit Nation (Thornton 2015, p. 43), but most recently, in 2019, the population was approximately 17,000 people (Milioti 2019). This only includes people who still reside in the geographic boundaries of the Tlingit region, but of course, like Donna, many Tlingit today live outside of Southeastern Alaska. Historically, everyone in the Chilkat River region belonged to a class. They were either of nobility, high caste, an artist (equal to high caste), or common people.

Both Louis and Florence were in the noble class, and following tradition, marriages were made of people of equal casts in order to prevent wars (Shotridge & Shotridge 1913). This is interesting when looking at the Shotridges' appeal in American newspaper articles. As aforementioned, U.S. government policies were focused on assimilating Indian peoples at this time. There was also an interest in salvaging a record of Native Indians before their cultures were gone which was done through salvage anthropology. We also see the concurrent admiration of Native Indians by segments of society. In almost every newspaper that features an article on Florence, her noble status is highlighted and celebrated (The Evening Bulletin 1912; Christian Monthly 1916; The Telegraph 1917; The American Indian Magazine 1917). In a letter from George Byron Gordon to Edward Curtis, a fellow North American ethnographer, Gordon informed Curtis that he could not get in touch with Louis Shotridge as he was on a trip. He follows with "I doubt if we shall see him here again as his restlessness under civilized conditions makes him disinclined to stay long in one place" (Gordon 1912). So, the social unit of a Tlingit person and their social status was not always perceived accurately by Americans. Even though the couple had noble status in their own Tlingit communities, which newspapers highlighted, the Americans they worked with, like Gordon, did not always treat them as such.

Significant rituals like the Potlatch, or *ku.éex'*, indicate the importance of social organization and rankings within Tlingit society. I will be focusing on the traditional format of the potlatch, but they still occur among Tlingit today with modern changes to the format as seen in Figure 2 (Williams 2020). A potlatch occurred about a year after a prominent figure died (Thornton 2015, p. 174). The hosts were from the matrikin of the moiety whose members' death was being recognized, and the guests were of the members and matrikin of the opposite moiety (Kan 1986). The ceremony included singing, oratory from a respected community member,

sporting of regalia and crests, a feast, the reallocation of the dead's *at.óow*, or owned things, and the naming of new children in the community (Williams 2020; Kan 1986; Thornton 2015; Beaver 2021). It was during the reallocation of the deceased's *at.óow* that the aristocratic moiety members could have either reasserted their dominance or obtained more. Thornton (2015) emphasizes that although this is not an outright battle, it can still be an aggressive form of domination (p. 180). The hosting moiety would plan and host the event, and the opposite one would help out with practical tasks, comfort mourners, and give gifts to the hosting moiety (Kan 1986; Williams 2020). Guests would include community members of all ranks and ages, but were seated based on social status (Kan 1986).



Figure 2: A potlatch ceremony in Hoonah, Alaska attended by Lucy Fowler Williams on October 14, 2017. Photo by Lucy Fowler Williams (Williams 2020, p. 230).

Kan (1986) considers the dead as having both a pure “inside,” or social persona, and a polluted “outside,” the body. The Tlingit would cremate their dead at potlatches because it

eliminated the polluted outside so all that is left is the pure inside. Once the cremation happened, the dead would be considered participants throughout the entire ceremony and played the central role throughout the night (Kan 1986). The identity of the dead do live on through the renaming portion of the ceremony, and allow the deceased's identity to live on for eternity. The same applies for the passing down of *at.óow* (Thornton 2015). This ceremony is the last place the mourners can express their grief publicly, and it is also a key place where social organization is either justified or challenged. Each attendee's social status directly affects the way they engage with the potlatch.

Names of Persons and Places

Names in Tlingit culture often evoke stories of the past. Whether it be a name of an ancestor, or a place name that evoke geological erosion, Tlingit names are Tlingit history. I begin by discussing the significance of a person's name then explain how Tlingit people are often named using Donna's life history as an example. Then, I build on the discussion from previous sections and continue to discuss the significance of place names. As an example, I discuss George Shotridge, Louis's father, who created a remarkable map featuring over 100 place names in four different linguistic renderings with his two wives.

Birth names give humans a personal identity (Thornton 2015, p. 59; Beaver 2021). They can often show social rank (Thornton 2015, p. 59) and evoke *shagóon*, or ancestors' memory (Ibid, p. 55). Names that have a connection to place is a theme among all Native Indians, and names in Tlingit do not typically have a place name *in* them - "place is more part of who you are" (Beaver 2021). Usually, Tlingit children are named by their grandparents or close clan elders who see something in them at birth at potlatches. This is because often in Tlingit families,

elders could tell certain things about their grandchildren at birth (Beaver 2021; Thornton 2015, p. 98). In Donna's own life, a village elder, Grandpa Anderson, was there when she was born. When her mother was considering giving her away, as she was a single mom, her grandfather Anderson said she cannot give Donna away because she will be their only grandchild who will be connected to her tribe and culture. Tlingit people also believe in reincarnation and have premonitions in their dreams which they take very seriously. In fact, certain elders are respected for their premonitions, and in the past, people were given names for these abilities. An elderly woman wanted Donna to have her mother's name and that is how she was named (Beaver 2021).

Donna's great-grandparents were born in the same era as Florence, and when they were young, American missionaries entered the Tlingit Nation. Since the Western missionaries could not pronounce Tlingit names (Thornton 2015, p. 57), Tlingit people stood in lines in order to get an anglicized or Christian name. This might be where the name "Florence" came from. The meaning behind Florence's Tlingit name will be discussed in her biographical section. Place names in Tlingit often refer to a "storied landscape" (Ibid, p. 69) and evoke the physical, historical, mythical, biological, and geographic history of a specific place. For example, the place name *Yoo Luklihashgi X'aa* translates simply to "Floating Point" in English, but a more accurate rendering of this name is "Point that Moved Up and Down in a Perching/Squatting Posture" (Ibid, p. 86). Tlingit is a verb-dense language that tells the story of the past and shares how the landscape is changing over time. In contrast, English names are usually biographical, or named after someone, which is not the norm in Tlingit culture (Ibid).

In 1869, the chief of the Klukwan Whale House, Kohklux, or or *Yeil-gooxú*, was visited by George Davidson from the U.S. Coast Survey who was tasked with creating a map of this territory recently bought from Russia (Cession of Alaska Treaty 1867; Williams 2015, p. 64).

Kohklux, Louis's grandfather, along with his two wives, helped Davidson by creating a map that spanned 500 miles around the Lynn Canal. This took three days. This cartographical feat also includes over 100 place names that were translated into three other Indian languages phonetically through English (Cloud 2012, p. 13). When studying the map, Cloud (2012) noticed how the place names of the region helped travelers find their way around the land and evoked "the legacy of thousands of years of cultures interacting over the great exchange between coastal and inland peoples" (Ibid, p. 13). Thornton (2015) notes how Tlingits only name features that are of use or interest to them, and in a society without many written records of history, the story of the land and its people can be found in the oral history of place names. These are not just maps of places, but maps of experiences, and they show us how Tlingits record and personalize the history of their surrounding environment.

Regalia, Symbols, and Chilkat Weaving

Tlingit regalia is often intricately made and decorated to invoke images of familial and ancestral history through the images of crests. This section first explains the importance of Chilkat robes, then uncovers how Chilkat weaving is done. I incorporate knowledge I learned from contemporary Chilkat weaver, Lily Hope and discuss her husband, Ishmael Hope's work on the significance of wearing such meaningful pieces during ceremonious occasions.

Lukaaxádi clan leader, Austin Hammond, spoke of the importance of Chilkat robes when interviewed by Thornton (2015): "woven into the blanket that I wear is important legend... And to those who come asking, 'Where is your history?' I answer, 'We wear our history'.

Traditionally, we have not been writers of books... Our clothing is the ownership and history of our land" (p. 60). Even when people are far from the Tlingit region, like Donna, regalia connects them to home (Ibid, p. 53). Hammond's sentiments show the sheer importance of *at.óow* for

Tlingits. Much of the way *at.óow* manifests itself is through artistic designs or oral storytelling which evokes *shagóon*. The aforementioned story of Louis's clan's grizzly bear crest, and the story behind it, underlines this.

Chilkat weaving is one of the most difficult weaving techniques in the world while also being one of the only weaving techniques that can create a perfect circle. Chilkat blankets are large 70 inch robes that are usually commissioned by someone from the opposite moiety (Emmons 1907; Hope 2021). This inter-moiety transaction strengthens ties in the community (Beaver 2021). It is typical that a husband would ask his wife to make a blanket for him, and this was the case for Florence. Materials originally included mountain goat wool (now more typically commercially manufactured wool yarn), spruce root, and yellow cedar bark (Thornton 2015). Chilkat weaver Lily Hope notes that it has probably been about 100 years since someone has been able to make a full 70 inch robe with the traditional combination and ratio of cedar bark to mountain goat (Hope 2021). From looking at Florence's unfinished Chilkat blanket, Lily guesses that it was made out of more than 50% bark which was normal as cedar bark was easier to find then. Now, Chilkat weavers use different variations of sheep wool which are more accessible to them and which create a much thinner thread, or warp, than what Florence used (Ibid). Traditional colors have always been blue-green, yellow, black because of the natural dyes Tlingits had access too, but sometimes red was used for mouths on crest designs. Lily notes how her mother's teacher, Jenny Thlunaut, said to use red sparingly in designs (Ibid).

Chilkat weavers then take their materials and start weaving on a backboard that supports the grand project (Emmons 1907). Chilkat weaving uses no tools except this backboard. All weaving and knotting is done by hand (Beaver 2021; Emmons 1907). Lily showed me the various braiding, weaving, and knotting techniques she uses which can be seen clearly in the

video portion of this project. Lily notes how Chilkat weavers shape negative space and use strong, braided black lines to create distinctive shapes (Hope 2021). Each blanket features the clan symbols and crests of the person who requested the blanket (Ibid), and each crest symbolizes a larger story that evokes clan history (Thornton 2015, p. 32). Tlingit storyteller and husband of Lily, Ishmael Hope (2020), notes how for Tlingits, “[art is] inseparable from the contextual appreciation of its history, its ties to a clan and its ownership, how it was made, the crests it embodies, and its deep connection to our lands and waterways... While Tlingit people never had a word for *art*, Europeans never had a word for *at.óow*” (p. 289). When hearing about Lily’s emotions toward weaving, it is evident that there are certain overlaps with the wearer’s and the weaver’s experiences with the Chilkat robe. Lily says that when she is weaving, it feels like “breathing with the universal consciousness. It feels like a union of spirit realm and physical world. It feels like the best meditation you can do. And... on a physical and mental aspect, it’s like organized chaos” (Hope 2021).

Ishmael Hope emphasizes the ties artistic renderings of clan symbols can have for a community, and alternatively Thornton (2015) notes how wearing such artistic creations, like the Chilkat Blanket, is “mapping” the body with clan history and the surrounding landscape. Hope (2020) also states how “Such objects could only be experienced in their true meaning through their uses in Tlingit potlatches” (p. 285). Regalia connected someone to their ancestors and potlatches were the large events where all forms of regalia would come together (Williams 2020; Kan 1986). Even the deceased were washed and dressed in clothing with clan symbols on them (Kan 1986). These symbols immediately showed a person’s social identity, and often it was the aristocrats who were tasked with guarding all of the ceremonial regalia (Ibid). While sporting such artistic and historical attire, all members of the potlatch would recount clan histories and

thus connect the oratory with the physical manifestations of social and Tlingit identity through artistic creations like the Chilkat blanket.

PART III: THE LIFE OF FLORENCE SHOTRIDGE (1882-1917)



Figure 3: Florence Shotridge in Tlingit style hide dress in front of her Chilkat Blanket on August 15, 1915. She wears Tlingit style moccasins. Photograph courtesy of Penn Museum Archives.

Early Life

Florence Dennis was born in 1882 in Haines, Alaska near the Chilkoot River which is pictured in Figure 4 (Shotridge Digital Archive 2011) This is not to be mistaken with the Chilkat River which is 20 miles away (Beaver 2021). Her Tlingit name was *Kaatxwaaxsnéi*, which refers to a special ceremony where clan elders would mix powdered abalone and clam shells with tobacco and smoke it (Christian Monthly 1916). According to Donna, abalone and clam shells cannot cause hallucinations (Beaver 2021). Florence is from the Raven moiety, and her clan is

Lukaaxádi, the people of Lukaax (Duncan Canal) which translates to “Off the Point” (Thornton 2015, p. 48). This area is situated within the *Jilkoot Kwáan* which was in Haines on the Chilkoot River (Thornton 2015, p. 45). She belonged to the Mountain House (Shotridge & Shotridge 1913, p. 80). Her father was a “well-known medicine man” (Christian Monthly, 1916), or shaman, and her mother shared the same socio-identity as her as it is passed down matrilineally. Florence had a brother named Bert Dennis (Milburn 1994). When recounting her childhood in “Indians of the Northwest,” Florence states:

I (Mrs. Shotridge is writing) have often heard my father say with pride that his house totems were painted by Shkecleka. Shkecleka was of the nobility of the Raven side and besides being the most famous chief of the Ravens was a clever artist as well. These house totems are very old, having been erected by my father’s ancestors. They were repainted by Shkecleka when my father was a boy. I can remember the rebuilding of the house, or rather some incidents connected with it, although I was then but a small child. What impressed me most was the mountain of steps at the entrance. I was so tired going up these steps that I begged to be carried in the ceremony attending the opening of the house. A long line of women dancers formed around the room, and I cried to be allowed to dance with my aunt. They finally gave permission in spite of the fact that I was of the Raven side and the dancers were of my father’s side, the Eagle. This was but one of the many dances which were performed during the feast which attends the opening of a family house and lasts a week. There were a certain number of them, each being danced in its order. (1913, p. 84)

As a young girl, Florence enjoyed partaking in community gatherings, and during this time Florence went through the traditional rite of passage Tlingit women endure when they get their first menstrual cycle. Florence details this experience in her only solo-authored article, “The Life of a Chilkat Indian Girl.” When transitioning to womanhood, Chilkat society discouraged girls from talking loudly and prized silence and decorum in women. Upon puberty, girls underwent a period of training of four to twelve months where they engaged in seclusion, fasting, training in manners, and instruction in making a ceremonial outfit or object. At the end of this period, females engaged in the custom of “coming out”, dressed in a hooded leather robe, to signify their entry into womanhood. At this time, however, Christian missionaries starkly opposed these

customs so they were occurring less often with Tlingit women (Shotridge 1913). Donna's mother only spent one week secluded in a dark room instead of months, and Donna never underwent the seclusion period, but she does note that this ceremony was not meant to suppress women but rather signify their importance in Tlingit society (Beaver 2021).



Figure 4: Middle section of Chilkoot village. Photograph by Louis Shotridge (PM 14774).

In her mature years, Florence attended Presbyterian Mission School in her hometown of Haines. At this time, the U.S. government, which purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867 for \$7.2 million (Cession of Alaska Treaty 1867), banned the use of the Tlingit and promoted English through missionary schools (Milburn 1994). Florence's school was in the newly established Christian town at Portage Cove on Lynn Canal. The school was a place where Indians were taught to live in the white man's Christian world (Milburn 1994). She attended four years of high

school here and became a talented piano player, singer, and good English speaker (Christian Monthly 1916). This is also the place where she met Louis Shotridge (Milburn 1994). Their parents had arranged a marriage between the two when they were young, but they grew very close in their years at school together (Ibid). In 1902, on Christmas Day, the couple was married.

Traveling and Expositions



Figure 5: Florence completed her Chilkat Blanket in 1906. It now resides in the Canadian Museum of History in Quebec. Photograph courtesy of the Canadian Museum of History (CMH VII-A-131).

Three years later, in 1905, Alaskan governor John G. Brady asked Florence to become a representative of the Tlingit Nation at the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition. The Exposition drew 1.6 million visitors to Portland, Oregon who enjoyed not only Native craft

exhibitions but food, drinks, motion picture screenings, and other recreational and educational activities (Abbott 2018). The event was meant to boost Portland's local economy and showcase "prosperity and progress," but is now critiqued for presenting Native Indians as "savages" and in stereotypical fashion (Ibid). It was here, at the Alaskan Exhibit, where Florence demonstrated Chilkat weaving, which she learned from her mother along with beadwork and basket weaving (Milburn 1994). At this Exposition, she was working on the Chilkat Robe that Louis (from the opposite moiety) had asked her to make. In Figure 3, Florence is standing in front of the piece. It was made using:

Wild mountains goat's wool is used in the manufacture of the blanket; the wool is not sheared but plucked from the skin; after the long hairs are pulled, the down is separated and rolled on the lap and so spun into the fine yarns; the warp, which also forms the fringe, is interspun with fine strips of yellow cedar bark that gives body to the blanket. The dyes are vegetable and mineral; the hemlock bark is used for the black, the yellow tree moss for the yellow, and the copper ore for the blush of green. (Shotridge & Shotridge, History of Tina Blanket, p. 4)

In an interview with *The North American*, an old Philadelphia newspaper, Florence added that she used the wool of five wild mountain goats, and that the yellow tree moss was only found in Alaska and was difficult to extract (Smith 1912). It was therefore rare and expensive. Thornton (2015) echoes this notion when he states that Chilkat weavers at the time of post-missionary contact who used the traditional weaving methods with local material were highly respected for their skill and knowledge of the land. According to Donna, the colors of Florence's Chilkat robe aligned with traditional colors other Tlingit people used and that the Tlingit usually mix baby's urine with the copper ore to get the vibrant blue-green color. This is because baby's urine is clean and pure (Beaver 2021; Emmons 1907). When viewing her unfinished Chilkat blanket in the Penn Museum, I noticed that the backside of the blanket maintained the vibrant colors much better than the front which had faded (PM NA3902).

Florence spent 22 months making her blanket and the finished product can be seen in Figure 5 (CMH VII-A-131). Louis first offered the blanket to be sold to the Penn Museum through George Byron Gordon, but nothing came of it (Milburn 1994). Instead, at Gordon's suggestion he negotiated the sale of the blanket to Edward Sapir, a famous linguistic anthropologist who had been a fellow at the University of Pennsylvania ca. 1909 before moving to Quebec (Williams 2021). The letter exchange initially began with a request from Louis to find employment and housing in Ottawa where he and Florence might move, and eventually led to Florence's robe being sold to the Canadian Museum of History for \$200 (which is around \$5,260 in today's U.S. currency). Sapir hesitated to meet this asking price, but Louis did not allow it to be sold until his price was met. He mailed Florence's written history of the blanket, "History of the Tina Blanket." Milburn (1994) stated "Seldom in historical literature do we find a description of a Native American object written by its maker, particularly a woman" (p. 556). Louis argued that the materials to make the blanket alone cost over \$200 and that "The weave in the 'Tina Blanket' is rather coarse in comparison with some of the finest woven commercial blankets, but it must be remembered that even the material used in the finer parts of the 'Tina Blanket' is rolled and twisted by hand, while most of the wool in the commercial blankets are machine spun or store bought yarn" (Sapir & Shotridge 1913-1914). In many of the 21 serious letters involving the negotiation, Louis signed off by stating that "Mrs. Shotridge joins me in sending our best wishes to Mrs. Sapir and yourself" (Ibid). The transaction became final and Florence's blanket is still on display at the Canadian Museum of History today.

The blanket is often referred to as a *Tina'a* blanket because it includes an image of two copper shields, crest objects made out of hammered copper, on it. For Tlingits, a *Tina'a* is a sign of wealth as copper was a valuable resource and one of the most expensive gifts a Tlingit could

give someone (Kan 1986; Beaver 2021; Hope 2021). The blanket also features both the grizzly bear and shark emblems, which stands out because it was rare for Chilkat robes to have more than one animal on them (CMH VII-A-131; Beaver 2021). This is most likely because the grizzly crest was one of the first clan symbols of the Wolf (now Eagle) side and Louis wanted both this ancient symbol and the then modern shark symbol to both be included on the robe (Beaver 2021). All Eagle crest animals have teeth or claws and all Raven crests are less ferocious such as a frog or a beaver (Beaver 2021). One can see bear claws in the bottom halves of the copper shield and a shark in the bottom middle of the blanket (Beaver 2021; CMH VII-A-131). There is also a human face on the top center of the robe with two mirroring, side profile images of a human face to the bottom left and right of that section. “The head or face was the most important motif in [Tlingit] art,” (Thornton 2015, p. 97). Blankets often had human faces on them because when someone wore the robe, the eyes faced inward as a representation of self-reflection (Beaver 2021). This blanket would have been woven from a wooden pattern board (Beaver 2021; Cloud 2012, p. 17; Emmons 1907) and uses common Chilkat and totemic formline designs like mirroring images and a lot of eye-shaped ovoids (Beaver 2021; Emmons 1907).

While weaving this blanket at the Lewis and Clark Exposition, Florence and Louis were introduced to George Byron Gordon, then Director of the Penn Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Shotridge Digital Archive 2011; Milburn 1994). Gordon purchased 49 objects from the couple on this occasion. He discussed the possibility of having them lead an expedition in “the Kuskokwim River area of Alaska,” and spoke about the possibility of hiring them to “to tell the history and meanings of the different things” (Gordon 1906 qtd. in Preucel 2015, p. 44) as employees at the Penn Museum. Although this conversation eventually led to Louis’

employment at the Penn Museum, they were not offered positions for another several years. In the meantime, they participated in Antonio Apache's Indian Crafts Exhibition in 1906 in Los Angeles where Louis sold crafts alongside the manager of the event, Antonio (Kerr 2020). This is where Florence finished weaving her blanket (Milburn 1994). From 1907-1911 the couple worked with tutors to help with singing and English during this time while continuing to partake in various travel excursions and "Indian" craft displays (Ibid).

They also toured the country with The Indian Grand Opera Company in 1911 (Ibid). When asked what kind of performance they would have been a part of, Donna says most likely the Wild West shows where American audiences were shown a very stereotypical image of Native life (Beaver 2021). The show was not a success and later the couple participated in the World in Cincinnati Exposition in 1912 (Preucel 2015, p. 44). In a 1912 newspaper ad, the exposition was advertised as an event organized by "a committee of business men" where items would be auctioned off (The Cincinnati Enquirer 1912). Florence attended an all-women's college in Michigan and studied ethnology and anthropology (Christian Monthly 1916; The American Indian Magazine 1917). Her precise location and years of attendance are undocumented. After speaking with the Michigan government's archival team, I found that Florence likely attended either Michigan Female College in Lansing, or Michigan Female Seminary in Kalamazoo around 1910. Both schools' records have been destroyed or lost, so her name has not appeared in any of the extant directories, yearbooks, or class listings.

Work at the Penn Museum

In 1912, Gordon offered Louis a temporary position at the Penn Museum. Florence became a volunteer educator guide and gave young students tours through the Museum galleries (Shotridge Digital Archive 2011). Louis gave four formal lectures about Alaska and it is possible

the couple collaborated on these events (Williams 2015). During these tours, she wears what Milburn and Beaver identify as Plains garb of Indians which both Beaver (2021) and Milburn (1994) attribute to the norms of adhering to the white vision of Native Indian. She was beloved by the schoolchildren and was viewed as “very intelligent, educated, and sweet” (Mason 1960, p. 11). Also during this time, Florence helped Louis organize and document the Museum collections and traveled thanks to funding from the Penn Museum (Milburn 1994). This is around the time that Florence started to weave her second Chilkat blanket, but which was never completed (PM NA3902). It is pictured below in Figure 6.



Figure 6: This Chilkat Blanket is in the Penn Museum Collections today and was never finished by Florence Shotridge. Photography by Maria Murad. (PM NA3902)

During this time, the couple lived on 4013 Locust Street, according to the signage on Louis’ letters at the time (Sapir & Shotridge 1913-1914). This is now a local movie theatre named “The Rhythm Room”. After receiving Museum funding, in 1914, the couple was sent by Gordon to meet Franz Boas in New York and attend his lectures at Columbia. Both Florence and

Louis discussed Tlingit linguistics with Boas while there (Milburn 1994). At the end of their funded travel, the couple returned to Haines, Alaska. Here, they completed a small but successful field project and were asked to later return to produce more ethnographic work and collect more objects (Ibid). In 1915, Louis received full employment at the Penn Museum, and shortly after, in 1916, Philadelphia retail magnate John Wannamaker, a member of the Museum's board of trustees, asked both Florence and Louis to lead the Shotridge Expedition and return to Haines (Preucel 2015). This was the first anthropological expedition ever run by Native Indians, but it is important to note that Louis was paid as an employee and Florence was not despite them being co-leaders (Milburn 1994).

Death and Legacy

On this Expedition, Florence fell seriously ill with tuberculosis, something she had been dealing with years prior (Milburn 1994). The time and place of her originally contracting the disease is unknown. Louis and Florence settled in a house Louis had set up for field work, and it was there on June 12, 1917, two years into the Shortridge Expedition, when Florence died. Florence was buried in her family cemetery which would have been right next to her village, almost like a neighboring "village of the dead" (Kan 1986) and presumably enjoyed a potlatch ceremony to commemorate her life in the physical world. Louis was shaken by her death and took time before returning to work. Over a roughly twenty year period he returned to Philadelphia on only a few occasions. Over the course of his employment, he collected a total of 560 objects, 300 black and white photos, and several audio recordings – most are still housed in the Penn Museum collections today and a number of objects have been repatriated back to the Tlingit Nation (Williams 2015).

PART IV: CONCLUSION

Significance and Concluding Thoughts

Though Louis completed the Expedition on his own after Florence's death, many of the objects collected early in his career would not have been procured or studied without Florence. It was her weaving and English skills in the first place that got Louis to the Lewis and Clark Exposition where he met Gordon, and it was her Chilkat Blanket that created a connection between Louis and Edward Sapir (Milburn 1994). Her weaving work in Los Angeles, Cincinnati, and the Penn Museum helped create vital connections in academia that would be essential to Louis' career long after Florence's death. Once gaining a foothold at the Penn Museum, Florence's thoughtful essay conveying the importance of tradition for young Tlingit women along with her interest in travel, college, and education all speak to her strength as a young, eager Tlingit woman.

According to Lucy Fowler Williams, "The Shotridge collection has always been of significance to Tlingit people because it represents their cultural heritage. Today several objects collection have been claimed for repatriation under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 by different Tlingit entities" (Williams personal communication 2021). Many Tlingit people today marvel at Louis as a preserver of their cultural objects and heritage despite the controversies of Museum collecting at the time he was alive (Hope 2020; Williams 2020). I originally turned to this project after a trip to the Museum Archives when I noticed how scarce Florence's files were in comparison to those of her revered husband. In 1994, Milburn noticed a lack of recognition of Florence and her contributions to Tlingit history. Today in 2021, I still notice a similar lack of recognition of her work not only as an individual who authored two articles, wove a Chilkat blanket, and taught students in

Philadelphia in the short life she had; but also in the work she did alongside her husband where she is seldom given credit.

The goal of this paper is to create a new sense of visibility and understanding of Florence's biography in the context of Tlingit culture and history. Hope (2020) takes note of how odd it is for Tlingit people today to see their “at.óow lifelessly displayed in museum cases” (p. 290) when their art is meant to be appreciated through communal ritual and cultural practice. The video portion of this project aims to combat this lifelessness and create a publicly engaging piece of media that is hopefully as enlightening and educational as Florence herself was when she once taught in the Penn Museum halls.

Link to the short film, *Florence Shotridge* (2021): <https://youtu.be/dQTTGmLd63k>

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